

VZCZCXRO8618
OO RUEHIK RUEHPW RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #0877/01 1011338
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 101338Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3543
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000877

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR JWOOD
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CG CJTF-82, POLAD, JICCENT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL AGREEMENT REACHED ON SEPARATE ELECTION
CALENDAR; FOCUS TURNS TO PREPARATION AND FUNDING

REF: KABUL 498

11. (SBU) Summary. The prolonged political debate between Parliament and the Palace ended this week with an agreement to hold separate Presidential (in 2009) and Parliamentary (in 2010) elections using a Single Non-Transferable Voting (SNTV) system for the parliamentary elections. President Karzai agreed to the separate election calendar advocated by Parliament (and United Front) in return for Speaker Qanooni and other Parliament leaders giving up their call for a system of proportional representation (PR). The Independent Election Commission (IEC) issued a statement on April 9 confirming the decision on the election calendar. Parliament continues to debate the electoral law, which will formalize the agreement on the election system, but the political agreement allows the government and international community to begin detailed planning, including identifying funding sources. SRSK Kai Eide told us he is meeting with Karzai and will reinforce our messages on the need for presidential decrees to spur the IEC, ministries, and donors into action. Addressing funding gaps and lack of leadership and capacity at the IEC must be priorities if the first elections run by Afghans themselves are to take place on time and be a success. UNAMA is attempting to draft a timeline for key decisions as a means of helping Karzai and the GoA to focus on decisions. End Summary.

Karzai and Qanooni Craft a Compromise

12. (SBU) A series of meetings over the past month including the Palace, Parliamentary leadership, and other senior Afghan politicians, produced agreement that there will be separate elections, with Presidential and Provincial Council elections in autumn 2009 and Parliamentary and District Council elections in summer 12010. This calendar is consistent with the constitution and Wolesi Jirga Speaker Qanooni's preferred outcome. (His position reflects his interest in being able to run for president without risk of forfeiting his seat in the Wolesi Jirga.) In return, Qanooni (representing the United Front as much as parliament) gave up his demand for at least some seats being allocated by means of

proportional representation (PR). While parliament is still debating the electoral law, it is understood that Qanooni has agreed it will call for all seats being allocated by means of SNTV (single non-transferable vote). Candidates will be able to list their party affiliation with their name, but all votes will be cast for individuals, not party lists.

Lower House Debates the New Election Law

¶3. (SBU) The Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) debate over the draft electoral law will continue until all 70 articles have been discussed. Each article and issue provides an opportunity for contentious debate. Progress stalled on April 9 over an article that will determine whether Koochis (nomads) should be allowed to cast their ballots in any province or only in those where they are concentrated. The Lower House also engaged in a lengthy debate over the ballot counting methodology, which is technically outside their purview. (When, how, and where ballots are counted will be an IEC decision, but parliamentarians who cite reports of fraud in the counting process during the last elections, are determined to make their view known.) Agreement on the election calendar removes a major disincentive for finalizing the election law, but debate in the Wolesi Jirga (Upper House) is expected to continue for at least a week. The bill then goes to the Meshrano Jirga for review before going to the President for signature.

Planning for Voter Registration Behind Schedule

KABUL 00000877 002 OF 003

¶4. (SBU) There must be a new voter registration, regardless of the election system adopted. According to draft timelines, the registration process should take place during the summer of 2008 and last two months, with the possibility of another round to catch any missing registrants prior to the 2010 Parliamentary elections. The plan is to have voters register and vote at the same polling center of the 7000 to be established across the country.

¶5. (SBU) UNDP, through the ELECT program, is providing technical assistance to the IEC as it develops a registration plan and budget, but the process is well behind schedule due to a lack of IEC capacity and presidential guidance. GardaWorld, a private security firm funded by USAID, is conducting a voter registration operations and logistics assessment across Afghanistan. Their report, due by mid-April, will help guide decisions by the IEC on implementation of voter registration. The IEC is planning to establish a voter registration operations center (VROC) at the IEC, and possibly a voter registration security center at the National Police Command Center. The MoD, MoI, NDS, ISAF, and CSTC-A have agreed in theory to staff these centers, however they say they need the yet to be completed IEC operational plan to determine the appropriate level of support. COMISAF has made clear that ANSF will be responsible for security for voter registration and elections, and ISAF will provide 'in extremis' support only.

Significant Funding Gap will Need to be Filled

¶6. (SBU) While the U.S. anticipates funding a significant share of the costs of registration and elections, other donors will need to provide the additional \$279 million needed to cover the balance of the estimated \$480 million cost of registration and elections, including security. At this time, only the

U.S., the UK, and Canada have pledged support. USAID is likely to increase their initial contribution for voter registration by \$50 million for a total of \$65 million, and anticipates contributing approximately \$136 million for the elections themselves (for a total U.S. contribution of \$201 million). Canada and the UK have pledged approximately \$4 million and 1 million pounds respectively for voter registration. The IEC has still not produced a preliminary budget which would help focus other donors on the need to identify resources to fill the funding gap.

IEC: More Responsibilities than Leadership or Capacity

17. (SBU) Weak leadership and capacity at the IEC contribute to slow progress on key electoral projects, including budget preparation, registration planning, voter education, and training. The commission, independent in name only, receives direction from the Palace, but only limited financial, managerial, or political support. All planning documents must pass through the board of commissioners before being released and enacted. The terms of the board members expired in January, and while the incumbents remain in place, they are essentially placeholders. The Chairman is ill and, even when healthy, largely ineffective. President Karzai may be more likely to name the new Commission now that there is agreement on the calendar and law. In the meantime, the IEC staff lacks direction, lacks direction or drive.

International Support to Afghan Elections

18. (SBU) International engagement on the elections issue has lagged, but Kai Eide has quickly focused on the

KABUL 00000877 003 OF 003

issue. We reviewed for him on April 8 the challenges, our timeline and what we and UNAMA elections experts agree is the estimated budget to be funded. (He was visibly surprised by the \$480 million figure.) He welcomed the input, saying he would be meeting with President Karzai on the issues within days and planned to use the timeline to underline the importance of prompt decisions and action to achieve the goal of successful Afghan-run elections. Eide said he would highlight the funding issue as well and flag the Paris Conference as the critical point for garnering the resources that will be needed. These messages track with those we have delivered to the Palace, to key parliamentarians, and to the IEC.

19. (SBU) UNDP is developing a comprehensive funding document for distribution to donors. Several donors say they expect some Afghan financial contribution to voter registration and elections. Current cost estimates, based in large part on the 2004/2005 elections, are however roughly twice the Afghan national budget. Thus any Afghan contribution will be symbolic and not lessen substantially the need for donor support. The May JCMB meetings and June Paris Conference will be critical opportunities to rally donors to fund roughly half of the budget.
DELL